

Mapping the policy landscape for women's economic empowerment in Uganda

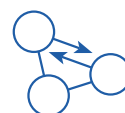
Women make up more than half of Uganda's population, and 46% of its workers. But their earnings and the security and quality of their jobs lag well behind that of men. Policy and legal reforms have largely focused on improving employment prospects in the formal sector, yet women are concentrated in informal and unpaid employment, and further held back by the burden of domestic care.

While the effects of COVID-19 on Uganda's economy have yet to be quantified, there have been extensive job losses in services such as tourism and hospitality which are dominated by women. Self-employed women have also been severely restricted by business closures.

Research can help to advance WEE in Uganda by focusing on:



The effectiveness of existing and planned WEE policies to inform implementation and future action



Strengthening links between policies and programs, and those involved



Work readiness programs that effectively move women and girls into gainful employment



Addressing gendered segregation, sexual harassment, and abuse in the work place



The effects of COVID-19 on women's employment in informal and vulnerable sectors and on men's contribution to UCW

What are the policy levers advancing women’s economic empowerment (WEE) in Uganda, and what role can research play?

This brief captures the main findings of a scoping paper that highlights policies, plans, and initiatives related to WEE. It identifies key stakeholders championing WEE—particularly in addressing unpaid care and women’s labour market participation—and opportunities for leveraging relevant policies and initiatives for greater impact. The paper highlights where research can help to advance WEE in Uganda. The authors conducted a rapid assessment of the policy and programming through an extensive desk review and qualitative and quantitative analysis of secondary sources.

Women’s economic status in Uganda

Nearly 86% of female workers are in vulnerable employment—with low earnings, low productivity, and difficult work conditions—compared to 71% of their male counterparts. Male workers are also twice as likely as females to be in paid employment. Even among paid workers, the 2016/17 National Labour Force Survey revealed a gender gap in monthly earnings of 40%, with women averaging UGX 150,000 (about USD 42) vs UGX 250,000 (about USD 71) for men.

Evidence shows that women and girls do more unpaid care work (UCW) than their male counterparts, across all age categories. They spend twice as much time as males—spending an average of 20 hours weekly on these tasks compared to only 10 hours for males. Women aged 31-59 years carry the heaviest burden of unpaid care work.

Laws, policies, and plans relevant to WEE

Women’s rights have a strong legal basis in Uganda, grounded in Article 3 of the Constitution, which explicitly prescribes equality between women and men under the law, and the right to equal opportunity. A series of supportive laws have been enacted, including the Employment Act 2006, Workers Compensation Act 2000, the Local Government Act, the Land Act, the Land Acquisition Act, the National Agricultural Advisory Services Act, and the National Women’s Council Act.

The Employment Act 2006 prohibits gender discrimination in payment and any form of sexual harassment in employment. It provides for better working conditions for all categories of work and prohibits discrimination against breastfeeding in the work place, encouraging employers to put in place policies and, where possible, facilities to accommodate nursing mothers.

The current legal framework does not explicitly address the gender pay gap in the labour market, nor the recognition, reduction, redistribution, and representation of unpaid care work. Unpaid care is indirectly tackled under the 1997 Local Government Act, through provisions



“Women who are overrepresented in the informal sector [...] have lost their only sources of income because they have been forced to stop working indefinitely.”

- Ugandan NGO Akina Mama wa Afrika on the impacts of COVID-19

that recognize and reduce UCW and foster labour market participation by addressing challenges affecting women and girls, such as the distance to water sources, health facilities, and primary schools.

Some 29 different policies touch on various components of WEE. The overarching Uganda Gender Policy 2007 was designed to establish a clear framework for identifying, implementing, and coordinating interventions designed to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment in Uganda. The National Employment Policy seeks to promote productive and decent employment for all women and men by increasing productivity, competitiveness and employability of the labour force; ensuring the availability of reliable and timely labour market information; and promoting affirmative action, adequate safety nets, and social protection for poor and vulnerable groups—all fundamental in promoting women’s participation in the labour market. The Gender in Education Sector Policy 2016 has a direct bearing on women’s labour market participation by emphasizing equal access to education and training for men and women.

Unpaid care work has received limited policy focus relative to other WEE domains. While it is not yet operational, the 2016 National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy is the only one that addresses UCW. It advocates for the establishment of early childhood development (ECD) centres in primary schools and community centres to reduce the burden of child care. Due to limited funding, and given limited government involvement in ECD, most childcare provision is in the private sector.

Key national policies that address WEE:

- Uganda Gender Policy 2007
- National Land Policy 2013
- National Employment Policy 2011
- Equal Opportunities Policy 2006
- Gender in Education Sector Policy 2016

Uganda’s successive National Development Plans (NDPs) have recognized the role that traditions/customs play in discrimination against women, and lay out approaches to address gender-related impediments to development. The latest NDP (2020/21–2025/26) advocates for institutionalizing ECD centres and expands care, support, and social protection services for the most vulnerable groups. The plan also advocates for labour market programs targeting women and expansion of contributory social security schemes to the informal sector, where most women are employed. There are plans to consolidate and integrate program funds for women and other special groups into area-based local economic development programming.

Notwithstanding the range of supportive policies and legal provisions, achievement of WEE outcomes is hampered by a number of challenges, including:

- limited awareness about different laws protecting women’s rights in the workplace
- inadequate political will
- weak enforcement
- the fact that most laws ignore the role of men in women’s empowerment
- a lack of gender-sensitive policy implementation strategies
- insufficient baseline information to inform targets and operational plans
- limited monitoring, evaluation, and timely review of policies.

Furthermore, some aspects of WEE, such as care work, are mostly found in the realm of informal labour, which is largely unregulated. Gender-responsive budgeting remains a challenge despite government efforts to expand training in this area. The national budget has consistently not taken unpaid care work into account.

The authors also found that three out of six policies related to workplace equality were more than 10 years old, and therefore may not reflect current challenges facing women.

Programs that address WEE

More than 170 programs in Uganda address various aspects of women’s economic empowerment, with

the bulk focusing on labour market participation. Relatively few tackle unpaid care work, though efforts are being made to recognize and include UCW in nationally representative surveys, and to reduce the burden of care indirectly by improving health facilities and increasing access to water, energy, and social protection. A number of non-state actors have also invested in areas that could alleviate UCW, such as UNICEF, which supports community-based ECD and maternal health initiatives.

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of WEE-related programs by state actors and non-state partners target financial inclusion, property and assets, and vocational and life skills acquisition, which directly or indirectly foster labour market participation.

Figure 1. Spread of programs across WEE domains in Uganda



Source: Adopted from the Global Center for Gender Equality (2020)

In looking at the few available evaluations of state programs, the authors note that those addressing provision of finance have weak links with skills development, likely due to weak coordination among implementing agencies. They also find that program interventions in infrastructure-related ventures (health, education, roads, water, and energy) lack a specific gender focus. Evaluations of non-state programming, mostly focused on ECD centres or financial aspects of labour market participation, have been limited and area-specific.

Research entry points

While Uganda has many laws and policies to foster gender equality and WEE, implementation suffers from limited baseline data and a general lack of evaluation. A research program to build a strong database on WEE domains and evaluate the effectiveness of relevant policies would help to inform future policies to address persistent constraints to women's advancement. The gaps between policy and practice also remain a challenge. Research exploring effective ways of linking these spheres, and the state and on-state actors involved, would also have immense value.

Regarding labour market participation, there are wide evidence gaps around the types of training, support, and soft skills development that can help women move into gainful employment, including the role of mentorship, apprenticeship, and internship. And there is limited evidence on how to address gendered segregation, and other types of exploitation such as sexual harassment, at work.

Regarding unpaid care work, programs evaluating social norms and their impact on UCW are non-existent in Uganda. There are no specific known programs that address UCW constraints.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a serious impact on labour market participation. With most employed



women in informal and vulnerable work, it is important to understand how the pandemic has affected their employment status. The lockdown and home isolation may have encouraged some men to participate in UCW. It will be important to understand whether men's appreciation of the burden of unpaid care work has increased, and whether this may be influencing gender norms around unpaid care work.

*The **Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) East Africa** initiative seeks to spur transformative change to advance gender equality in the world of work. It is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Building on the success of the multi-funder GrOW program, GrOW East Africa aims to enhance gender equality and the economic empowerment of marginalized women in five countries of focus: Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda. It will foster new in-country knowledge, innovations, and solutions to inform policies and programs addressing unpaid care work, sex segregation in labour markets, and women's employment.*

Scoping papers were commissioned for each of these countries to form a baseline that will allow for monitoring progress in implementing GrOW East Africa. The paper "Policy mapping: Women's economic empowerment in Uganda", which this brief draws from, was prepared by Grace B. Kyomuhendo, Madina M. Guloba, and Nathan Sunday.

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